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The *Entheos* Diagnosis

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Liberal Studies

I. The Fall

Carl could argue that the fall never happened. One moment he was gathering his things to leave the lab for the day, and the next he was prone on the linoleum floor, staring up at the fluorescent lights. A fly or some other buzzing insect had crawled through a crack in one of the plastic panels, and Carl could make it out as a shadow drowsing between the panel and the light and then back again, its movements languid with coming death.

They're going to have to put me on medication, Carl thought, I've really lost it. I don't even feel like getting up.

Even though he had never taken drugs of that kind in his life, he unconsciously reached toward his breast pocket for a few tablets of something that would stabilize him. He found only tiny crumbs of lint. Sometimes Carl imagined that time was only an illusion produced by his mind, and in half-conscious moments it was possible for him to lift the veil and accidentally remember what was still yet to happen. So he wondered for a moment if he weren't just recalling a habit he would develop in the future. But then, thankfully, he returned to his senses, and the wondering ceased.

He had blacked out for only a moment, though he could not be sure it was only a moment. It seemed more like a record skipping than the playing of an entire song. Now that he was aware of his body again, he wondered if perhaps he had been unconscious for a while; he felt like a hunk of slate: flat, hard, sharp, and immobile. He fancied a wet-rock smell, overpowering even the antiseptic that permeated the dimly lit room.

And then, interrupting all of his senses: Natasha.

Natasha rolling into his nostrils like a plume of smoke in reverse, curling up to tickle his eyes. Natasha. Gazing into the microscope, biting her plump lower lip until the lipstick stained the edges of her two front teeth. Breathing in the silent room. Sometimes, when it was particularly quiet, and they were the only two people in the lab, he found himself intoxicated by her breathing, faint and rhythmic and slightly damp.

And then Carl remembered why he was still at the lab this late. Why he was alone. Why he might be more likely to fall than usual.

Some people see their entire lives crammed into a single moment's rash action. And so it was with Carl.

He shouldn't have looked at her like that. But he couldn't help himself. The way she walked. The way she breathed. Why did everything feminine about her have to be so loud, such an announcement? Her body entered his field of vision with a trumpet flourish. And then she

had the nerve to press herself against him like that. He hadn't meant to kiss her back. He really hadn't. In his mind he had been telling her, "No, no. I love my wife."

Who kissed whom, anyway? In his memory, it was she who kissed him, but could he really be sure after he had looked at her like that?

All he knew for certain was that he had broken her nose.

He didn't remember hitting her. He only remembered blood and widened eyes. He had never hit anyone before, not even a schoolyard bully, not even his younger brother.

He had begun to shake, lying there on the floor. It was cold, and he felt expended, as though he had actually taken her there in the lab and not shattered her face instead. Had he hit her more than once?

How long ago was it that he had hit her? Ten minutes? Two hours?

What if she didn't tell anyone? He kept assuming she would report him, but in some way she was complicit. Perhaps she would keep it a secret, say she had fallen down the stairs.

But would he be able to lie?

Carl was not a liar. He told the truth as often as he could. He prided himself on being an honest, ethical person. In six years of marriage, he had never cheated on or lied to his wife, beyond the little white fibs considerate spouses tell. The two of them were so close that even if he said nothing to her, Emily would look at him and know that he was keeping something from her.

Emily. He would tell her everything. It would be hard for her, but she would understand. She knew how hard Carl tried to be a good person, that this surge of passion and violence was only an anomaly. And surely his confession alone would prove his love for her. She would have to forgive him.

Feeling this imagined reassurance, Carl sat up, and immediately his head began to sail away from his body. It sank back down with a sudden jerk that radiated pain from his forehead and temples all the way down his spine. He reached around the back of his head and felt the damp stickiness of blood. He needed to see a doctor.

Fumbling for his phone in his pants pocket, Carl heard the voice for the first time. It was deep and sonorous and tinged with a British accent. It almost seemed to sing the following lines:

"...and feel/ What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal..."¹

A voice from another room, Carl thought to himself, as he stood, weaving back and forth and reaching out for the counter to steady himself.

He drew in a sudden sharp breath, as though in pain, but he felt no new overwhelming sensations besides the throbbing of his head and surprise tears pricking the inside of the corners of his eyes. How could he have done that? How could he have hurt her like that?

¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron. "The Sea," from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Immortal Poems of the English Language*. Ed. Oscar Williams. New York, New York: Washington Square Press (1952). p. 292-293. This book is perhaps not the traditional choice of a scholarly resource for the poems of Byron and Shelley, but it was the first book of poetry I ever received as a child, and it has great personal significance to me. Consequently, it is the perfect resource for this paper.

He pulled out his phone again to call her, to apologize, to attempt to explain, but he only ended up staring down at the device in his hand, something that suddenly seemed so small and plastic and weightless that it begged to be thrown against the far wall.

“There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,/ There is a rapture on the lonely shore...”²

The voice again. And this time he was sure he heard a bird singing. Carl rubbed his head. “Yes, 911,” he muttered aloud, “I was going to call for help. I need help.”

II. She Walks in Beauty

Emily was shaking her head as she strode into the hospital room. “Carl Malone Townsend, really,” she chastised. “Falling in the lab? What was there even to trip over? It’s the cleanest place in the world! You really are an absentminded professor!” Petite as she was, impossibly thin and just over five feet in height, she had the aura of a giant, and her flair for heels and unconventional fashion added to her electric presence, which filled the entirety of any room she entered.

Carl blushed and smiled as Emily politely drew her long blond hair behind her ear so it would not sweep over his face as she leaned over to kiss his cheek. He was always a little awed by her. They had started dating when they were undergraduates, both of them chemistry majors with similar career paths in mind, until Emily had suggested that they modify their plans to allow for a more cohesive union, one without the pressures and complications of professional competition. And so Emily generously switched her major to pre-med, asking Carl first if he would mind not always being the breadwinner, and now she made a healthy living as a neurologist, leaving the trials and tribulations of research and academia to her husband.

Emily examined Carl’s stitches with a skeptical frown while gently massaging his thinning brown curls. “How do you feel?” she asked.

“And on that cheek, and o’er that brow,/ So soft, so calm, yet eloquent...”³

Carl cleared his throat. He had told the doctor that he had been hearing voices, but now he found himself hesitating before confiding in his wife.

“Fine, but...I keep hearing this voice...”

“A voice?” Emily removed her hand from the back of his head and moved so that she could closely examine Carl’s face. “How long have you been hearing this voice?”

“Since the fall,” Carl replied.

Emily frowned again. “You told the doctor?”

Carl nodded.

Emily sighed and sat on the side of the hospital bed. “The mind is a funny thing, and it can play such tricks on us.” She turned to Carl again and smiled. “But such effects are not uncommon, and I am sure it is only a temporary quirk!” She pressed him into a velvety kiss and then stopped mid-tongue: “Whose voice is it that you’re hearing?”

² Ibid.

³ George Gordon, Lord Byron. “She Walks in Beauty.” *Immortal Poems of the English Language*. p. 291.

"I'm not sure," Carl paused, driving his lips as far into his face as they would go. "I think it's Lord Byron."

Emily chortled. "Lord Byron! Is he enticing you to fight in Greek wars and seduce young men and women?"⁴

"Not yet."

"Well, then," Emily said, ruffling his hair, "enjoy it. I think I would quite like to hear some poetry in my head now and then. And I am sure it is just temporary and meaningless." She pressed her lips into a firm line, nodding her head with conviction while also appearing to be entertaining a completely unrelated train of thought. She broke into another fit of chuckling. "Lord Byron! Is this a relapse into your undergraduate days?"

For a brief period of time in his sophomore year, Carl had contemplated a double-major in chemistry and English, but the prospect of an expensive fifth year of school had dissuaded him. The memory caused Carl to think of Harold, his college roommate, a professed poet and eccentric soul Carl had not spoken to in years.

"I wonder how Harold Murphy is doing," Carl mused.

"Harold Murphy! That lout!"⁵ Probably seducing innocent girls at a community college somewhere," Emily said.

She turned out to be, as usual, entirely correct.

III. A Fence with Poetry

There was a new voice now, higher and sweeter, and it would not let him sleep. It launched into a lengthy treatise that at first Carl was not sure he would like to follow, though he did, in a moment of half-sleepy interest, finally attempt an understanding, just in case it would shed light on the nature of his disorder:

"According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced, and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts

⁴ "[Byron was]...the first and ongoing celebrity, hero and villain, wooer and narcissist, shackled with a label that has entered everyday currency of being 'mad, bad and dangerous to know.'" O'Brien, Edna. *Byron in Love: A Short Daring Life*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company (2009).

⁵ "His shyness and sense of friendlessness made him look for comfort in love affairs, but as he was unconsciously seeking a mother rather than a mistress, all disappointed him except Augusta." Russell, Bertrand. "Byron." *Byron: a Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Paul West. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc. (1963), p. 153. Emily's analysis of Harold's romantic life is meant to be reminiscent of Russell's analysis of Byron's. Neither one is rationally "incorrect," but there still seems to be something wrong in looking at the life and emotions of another human being and dismissively reducing them to a series of psychological issues that the truly discerning mind would have recognized and rooted out. If it is really so easy and desirable to live rationally, why don't more people do it? And if Emily and Russell are so rational, why do they become so emotional in their condemnation of those who threaten their sense of logic and order? Is there, perhaps, an invisible mythology underlying their perfectly reasoned judgment?

so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.”⁶

Reason, “the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced”—Carl looked at the lamp, unlit, beside his bed. His phone was there beside it; he snatched it up and began typing in as many of the words he could recall, which was surprisingly easy. It seemed that the voice was whispering them again in slow motion, so he could catch every word. “So at least my delusions pity me,” Carl mused. Emily stirred beside him in her sleep, but she did not wake.

One thought to another? First, I thought of getting my phone, and then I thought of typing the words, and now I’m thinking of my thinking. I got my phone in order to type the words, and I began to think about my thinking because I read the words I was typing. This is reason.

And now I will color these thoughts, and compose from them, “as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.” Other thoughts? An act of creation. It is helpful that my phone is beside my bed. Not even five years ago I would have had a notebook and pencil beside my bed to catch fleeting contemplations such as these. I miss that notebook sometimes. I could flip through it, feel the scratch of the paper in my fingers, and see all that I had accomplished, or at least tried to accomplish, in recent months. But the phone is easier and more convenient. And no gray smudges on my hands! This line of thinking is not very imaginative. Let me try again.

What if my phone secretly possesses consciousness and is controlling my thoughts? What if cell phones are all conspiring to take over the world? What if I am insane, and these problems I am having cannot be attributed to my head injury?

“Reason is the enumeration of qualities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those qualities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.”⁷

Dutifully, Carl typed, but he felt a strange heat in his cheeks. He almost chuckled, but he did not feel amused.

Shadow to the substance! Such backward thinking. So unscientific. The “perception of the value of those qualities” is always a matter of imagination, of opinion, of the values of a given time and culture, of an individual’s natural inclinations and experiences. The “perception” of the imagination is dangerously subjective and obscures rather than reveals the truth. These perceptions of value are always changing. How unreliable! Real truth stands the test of time and is not the agent of our meaningless emotional whims.

“Now that was a good example of imaginative thinking,” the voice continued. Carl was in the middle of typing “example” before he realized that the remark was aimed specifically at him.

⁶ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “A Defence of Poetry.” *Essays and Letters by Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Ernest Rhys. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press (1971), p. 1-41.

⁷ Ibid.

“Very funny,” Carl snapped.

“Carl, go back to sleep,” Emily muttered drowsily beside him. She turned over with her arms bent so that her hands were at the same level as her chin. Her hands flopped at her wrists as she moved, but even in sleep, she could not relax enough to lower her arms.

“Sorry,” Carl whispered. He turned off his phone and slid back under the covers.

“I’ll get you an appointment with Dr. Taine in the morning,” she murmured.

Dr. Taine was a psychiatrist who worked with Emily. As Carl crossed his own arms over his chest, he decided he would also give his old buddy Harold a call. It couldn’t hurt to get a second opinion.

IV. The Daemon of the Diner

Harold looked horrible. His rumpled, too-thick, too-long hair had been compressed into a crooked ponytail, and several hunks and strands had slipped loose or never agreed to conform in the first place. There were dry ravines under each of his bloodshot eyes, which he rubbed repeatedly in an effort to keep them open and to summon some much-needed moisture to his eyeballs.

“Based on what you have told me, I think you have a daemon,” Harold observed with a yawn.

“A demon? Jesus, Harold, are you going to start telling me I need an exorcist?”

“Not a demon, a d-a-e-m-o-n, a spirit. Socrates had one, though some people think he just used it to avoid questions he couldn’t answer or as an excuse to get out of talking to people he didn’t like.”

“What is a d-a-e-m-o-n?” Carl asked.

Harold sighed. “A spirit, like I said. Something from the other world. A spirit that fills you and inspires you, that gives you insights no one else can have, that gets you in touch with the great mysteries of life.” As his explanation gained momentum, Harold’s body came to life, and by its conclusion, he was rocking slightly in his seat with his arms spread wide.

“So I’m crazy,” Carl muttered.

Harold’s body contracted again and centered on his mug of coffee. “Basically, yes.”

“I think the voice is quoting Byron and Shelley to me,” Carl added.

“Remnants from your school days, I’m sure.”

“But I’m not sure what it all means. If I read some of the lines to you, could you explain them?”

Harold grimaced and ran his pointer finger over his lower lip. “Eh, romanticism was never my thing. But I’ll try. And I might be a bit rusty. Teaching freshman comp and ‘Appreciation of Poetry’ at Green Hill Community College has not exactly helped me to maintain rigorous academic standards for myself—or my students, for that matter.” Harold paused and patted his paunch. “But I’m going to need a little breakfast in me before we tackle this beast. What do you say...pancakes?”

“I had one of Emily’s homemade organic protein bars before I left this morning, so I’m fine.”

Harold shuddered. “Suit yourself.”

Carl cocked his head to the side and closed his eyes. “Did you hear that?”

“‘Tainted Love,’ yes, horrible song.”

“No, a bird. I heard a bird singing.”

Harold lifted his chin and sniffed the air as though he could smell sound. After a few moments he cleared his throat. “I don’t hear any birds, but it is difficult to hear anything over the pounding in my brain.”

“We look before and after,/ And pine for what is not:/ Our sincerest laughter/ With some pain is fraught;/ Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,”⁸ Carl erupted into verse. Embarrassed, he clapped his hand over his mouth as though he were a demure young woman who had just emitted a tremendous belch.

Harold’s eyebrows shot up. “Vomiting up poetry, now. That’s some head injury you’ve got.”

“What poem was it? Is it real? Did I just make it up?”

Squinting his eyes, Harold settled down deeper into the cushioned seat of the diner booth. “It’s Shelley, I believe—‘To a Skylark.’ I always liked those lines. It always seemed to me that they were true: there is a sadness that permeates everything...” Harold looked out the window at the sunlit world fractured by the fabric-lined vertical blinds. “Do you think birds know they’re going to die? Do you think they can have any concept of what death is? It’s probably just an instinctive fear. The same fear that causes deer to run headlong into speeding SUVs.” Harold chuckled.

“Harold, I’ve never read that poem in my life,” Carl said quietly.

“You must’ve. The brain records everything, or so I’ve heard, far more than you can ever actually remember. But you already know that, don’t you?”

Carl nodded. “I know. I know. But that’s not what it *felt* like...it really felt like something was speaking through me, causing me to say those lines.”

“Like a daemon?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll do some research for you, Carl, some of my kind of research. I’ll read up on the romantics, consult some academics that are more respectable than I am.”

“Teach me half the gladness/ That thy brain must know;/ Such harmonious madness/ From my lips would flow,/ The world should listen then, as I am listening now,”⁹ Carl recited.

“I am listening, Carl. Or should I say, *Shelley*. Oh, he had a way with women, Shelley!¹⁰ All of the romantics did. Who are you romancing these days, Carl?”

⁸ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “To a Skylark.” *Immortal Poems*, p. 303-306.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “While at Eton Shelley began two pursuits that would continue with intense fervor throughout his life: writing and loving, the two often blending together so that the loving becomes the subject matter for the

Carl's face flamed, and he glared at Harold. "My wife," he declared.

Harold shrugged his shoulders. "I guess you're still more of a scientist than a poet."

"I suppose running around with girls half your age is a more poetic way to live."

Harold smiled. The expression surprised Carl because there was no humor in it, only the effort of holding up a great weight. "They all died young, the romantics. That kind of fire can't last. It's true. That's why I've stuck with the twentieth century, when mankind found out exactly what dreams and passions are worth." He crumpled up his napkin in his right fist and then released it, watching it expand into a wrinkled ball. "I don't live poetically, Carl. No one does. Living is dirty and disappointing and mundane."

"Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn/ Of bitter prophecy,"¹¹ Carl replied.

Harold laughed. "'The world is weary of the past,/ Oh, might it die or rest at last!' That's from *Hellas*. I suppose, like you, I remember more than I think." He raised his coffee cup as though it were a goblet full of wine. "Let me drink down the urn of bitter prophecy!"

Carl clanked his empty mug against Harold's. Then Harold gulped down the rest of his lukewarm coffee and bellowed out, "Waitress! More mead!" He turned to Carl and winked. "Let me buy this daemon of yours a drink, even if it is decaffeinated."

Carl sighed. "I know enough to know this could be symptomatic of something serious, Harold."

Harold set his heavy hand on his friend's shoulder. "You do not know that for sure. Remember the skylark, Carl, and sing while you still can!"

There was a flush in Harold's cheeks and a brightness in his eyes that had not been there when he had first walked into the coffee shop. When the waitress finally approached their booth, Harold grabbed her hand and kissed it. The older woman snatched her hand back, but she giggled like a school girl when she saw the bashful grin on Harold's face.

V. A Don Juan Confession

Natasha's daughter May¹² looked almost exactly like her mother, except that her nose was not broken and her right eye was not marred by a purple blotch. She was also still girlishly slender, though the roundness of her face suggested an imminent future of voluptuousness. Natasha's extra flesh presented a problem even as she seated herself on the park bench beside Carl, for she had to check her skirt and adjust it to make sure that nothing unsightly was revealed. She was not obese, but she was built like an ancient fertility statue, and modern clothes and modern benches were not made for such extreme ins and outs. Carl immediately

writing." Greenfield, John R. "Percy Bysshe Shelley." *British Romantic Poets, 1789-1832: Second Series*. Ed. John R. Greenfield. Detroit: Gale Research (1990). *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 96.

¹¹ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "The World's Great Age" from *Hellas*. *Immortal Poems*. p. 294-295.

¹² May's name is inspired by Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" from *Immortal Poems*, not from these exact lines, but the season is referred to repeatedly in the poem: "Thanks to the human heart by which we live,/ Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,/ To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." p. 266.

felt the heat radiating off of her body, even though she had made a point of sitting at the far side of the bench. He could not tell if the electricity came from her or his own projection. He strained his neck away from her even as he turned his body toward her in order to converse.

May, who was around ten or eleven, raised her nose as she studied Carl. Her snide expression made Carl think that her mother must have told her that he was the cause of her injuries, but she introduced herself to him without any evident dislike. "I'm May. It's nice to meet you, Dr. Townsend." She held out her hand, and Carl realized that the young girl was simply trying to appear as mature as possible. He shook hands with her, and she then turned and pecked her mother respectfully on the cheek before scampering away to turn a series of clumsy somersaults on the park lawn. It was early spring, and still cold, but there was a soft edge to the wind, a sort of warm breath following the sting.

Natasha shook her head. "She's a weirdo, just like her mother." Natasha chuckled and then looked at the ground and waited for Carl to speak.

"Natasha, I'm so, so sorry," Carl gushed.

Tears were seeping out of Natasha's eyes. She waved away his words. "Oh, Carl, I don't know what happened. And I don't know why you...reacted that way. But it's certain that we can't keep working together."

"You should go to the police, Natasha. We shouldn't even be speaking."

"Carl, I don't know what happened that day in the lab! All of it, not just this," she gestured to her face. "I just want to forget it. Can the university give me some sort of severance if you fire me?"

"Fire *you*?"

"Yes, Carl. Fire me."

The daemon took hold of Carl. He leapt to his feet and mounted the bench with a straight back. As he stood at this new height, he took a sudden, sharp inhale and bellowed out the following lines:

"I WOULD to Heaven that I were so much clay,
As I am blood, bone, marrow, passion, feeling--
Because at least the past were passed away,
And for the future--(but I write this reeling,
Having got drunk exceedingly to-day,
So that I seem to stand upon the ceiling)
I say--the future is a serious matter--
And so--for God's sake--hock and soda-water!"¹³

Natasha stared up at Carl. "Are you drunk? What are you doing?" She rose from her uncomfortable seat and backed away from him, smoothing down her skirt as she moved.

¹³ Byron. "Don Juan." *The Literature Network: Online Classic Literature, Poems, and Quotes. Essays & Summaries.* <http://www.online-literature.com>. 28/12/2012.

His poetic demonstration had caught May's attention, and she had run back to the bench to look up at Carl in open-mouthed speculation. "Mom, is he nuts?" May asked, impressed.

Natasha took her daughter's hand. "Dr. Townsend, this is my formal notice. I will not spend another second in your presence, and if I am not properly compensated, you will hear from my attorney!" Her voice slipped into a wail with her last syllables, and she stormed away, dragging her daughter May along because the child continued to turn around and stare appreciatively at Carl. "He's nuts! He's really nuts!"

VI. Enlightenment

"I understand from your wife that we are still waiting for the results of some tests before we make an official diagnosis," Dr. Taine said. He gestured for Carl to take a seat in a leather armchair, and then he sat in the matching chair opposite.

Carl nodded. "Yes, but...I think that all of this might have started before the fall."

"Before the accident?"

"Yes."

"Hm." Dr. Taine stroked his beard. "Yes. You understand that despite my friendship and collegueship with your wife, our sessions are entirely confidential."

"Yes."

"Well, then talk to me about this, about your reasons for believing this began before your accident in the lab. What were you doing right before the incident occurred?"

"I don't remember. I only remember...hitting Natasha."

"Natasha? Who is Natasha?"

"Like thee, Man is in part divine,/ A troubled stream from a pure source; /And Man in portions can foresee/ His own funereal destiny,"¹⁴ Carl replied.

"Is that from a poem? Are you avoiding my question?"

"I can't control it. At first I would only hear it, in my head, but now I'm saying the lines aloud, and I don't remember ever reading them."

"Is the voice always reciting poetry?"

"Poetry, yes, and some essays. All by Byron and Shelley, I think."

"And this all started after you hit Natasha but before you hit your head."

"No, I didn't start hearing the voices until after I hit my head, but these...outbursts started when I hit her...when I just lashed out at her. I've never done that before."

"You've told your neurologist this?"

"No...my wife was there, and I didn't want her to know."

"I see. Do you mind if I speak with him privately? I think these symptoms might shed some light on the true nature of your disorder."

¹⁴ Byron. "Prometheus." *The Literature Network: Online Classic Literature, Poems, and Quotes. Essays & Summaries*. <http://www.online-literature.com>. 28/12/2012.

Carl already knew all of this; he already knew what the diagnosis would be. But he nodded and said nothing.

“So, Byron and Shelley...what significance do you think they or their work has for you?”

“I don’t know. I don’t really read any poetry. I don’t think I’ve looked at a poem since college.”

“You’re missing out. I’ve always admired the work of the romantics. Though Shelley should have reserved his enthusiastic imagination for his writing and not for his life.¹⁵ Oh, the destruction caused by people who let themselves be led around my dreams and delusions of grandeur! He even thought he could talk to the dead! Thank God for logic and science!” Dr. Taine let out an uncharacteristic chortle.

“Wasn’t Shelley at one time quite the amateur scientist as well?¹⁶ Wasn’t he the inspiration for Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein?” Carl countered.

“I believe so, but what is your point?”

“I only make observations. I believe I have no point,” Carl replied.

VII. *Entheos*¹⁷

“Carl!” Harold’s voice boomed through the phone. “Carl, this disorder of yours is really very fascinating! I have been up all night reading. I tried to piece together all of the fragments you gave me, their sources and their underlying connections, and now I have it!”

¹⁵ “[Shelley], one of the greatest poets of the age, son of a rich baronet, beautiful as an angel, of extraordinary precocity, gentle, generous, tender, overflowing with all the gifts of heart, mind, birth, and fortune, marred his life, as it were, wantonly, by allowing his conduct to be guided by an enthusiastic imagination which he should have kept for his verses.” Taine, H. A. “Modern Life: Ideas and Productions.” Trans. H. Van Laun. *History of English Literature*. London: Chatto and Windus (1890).

¹⁶ “The most positive memories Shelley had of his two years at Syon House were undoubtedly of the imaginative and lively lectures of Adam Walker on science-electricity, astronomy, and chemistry—an interest which Shelley retained throughout his life. In Shelley’s free-ranging mind there was no contradiction between an interest in science and an appetite for trashy Gothic romance thrillers, such as Matthew Gregory Lewis’s popular *The Monk* (1795).” (Greenfield)

¹⁷ [Late Latin *enthū̄siasmus*, from Greek *enthousiasmos*, from *enthousiazein*, to be inspired by a god, from *entheos*, possessed : en-, in; see **en-**² + *theos*, god; see *dhē-* in Indo-European roots.] Word History: Enthusiasm first appeared in English in 1603 with the meaning “possession by a god.” The source of the word is the Greek *enthousiasmos*, which ultimately comes from the adjective *entheos*, “having the god within,” formed from *en*, “in, within,” and *theos*, “god.” Over time the meaning of enthusiasm became extended to “rapturous inspiration like that caused by a god” to “an overly confident or delusory belief that one is inspired by God,” to “ill-regulated religious fervor, religious extremism,” and eventually to the familiar sense “craze, excitement, strong liking for something.” Now one can have an enthusiasm for almost anything, from water skiing to fast food, without religion entering into it at all. From: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/enthusiasm>. The evolution of our use of this word is so telling! The illusion of social order is much easier to maintain when people are taught not to take their passions too seriously. Unfortunately, I do not think most people seek the society of others for the sake of order; we seek each other for the sake of passion.

It was 7:30 AM on Sunday morning. Carl yawned and pushed his toast aside. Normally, he would be in bed at this hour, but the skylark in his head had started singing at sunrise. Emily was still asleep upstairs. “Okay, Harold, what have you found out?”

“*Entheos!*” Harold exclaimed. “I was only kidding with the daemon thing, but it seems my instincts were right, as usual! Ha!”

Carl held the phone away from his ear. “So what kind of a disease is *entheos*?”

“It’s not a disease. Well, not exactly. It’s a word, from the Greek. Sounds like enthusiasm, well, it’s basically the same thing. It originally meant ‘having the god within.’ And all of the pieces you gave me lead back to a kind of faith or need to get in touch with something that is beyond reason and beyond words.”

“So I’m secretly a religious fanatic?”

“Shelley was an atheist, Carl!¹⁸ This is bigger than God! God is a human construction. This is life! Life itself!”

Carl sighed.

Without further prompting, Harold launched into his analysis:

“The first snippets you heard are from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, and they are part of a section that is an ode to the unfathomable mysteries of the sea. The words you heard second—the pleasure of the pathless woods and the pleasure of the lonely shore—refer to the joy of contemplation away from the society of other human beings, of the sublime experience of embarking on something unknown, of being awed by something greater than other human beings and greater than yourself! And the first lines you heard, what can neither be expressed nor concealed, that’s what I’m talking about, Carl! Life! Can you put it into words?”

“Life is the condition that distinguishes organisms from inorganic objects and dead organisms, being manifested by growth through metabolism, reproduction, and the power of adaptation to environment through changes originating internally,”¹⁹ Carl replied.

“When you put it like that, it sounds terrible! Well, really, I guess it is terrible, but you’re distracting me from the point I was trying to make. Oh, yes! And Shelley’s essay ‘A Defence of Poetry’ is really quite apt, for it places the poet and the imagination above the pursuits, though they are still worthy and useful, of reason. He writes just after the part you quoted that reason is about breaking things into parts, and imagination is about reminding us how they all relate. But in that essay, Shelley also says that we are like instruments through which internal and external impressions pass, but that we color these impressions with our own internal

¹⁸ “Indeed Shelley and Hogg’s decision to publish Shelley’s *Necessity of Atheism*, together with their sending copies of it to the conservative Oxford dons, seems more calculated to antagonize and flout authority than to persuade by rational argument. Actually the title of the pamphlet is more inflammatory than the argument, which centers upon ‘the nature of belief,’ a position Shelley derived from the skeptical philosophies of John Locke and David Hume. Belief cannot come from a voluntary act of will; the burden of proof for belief can be found in only three sources: the senses, reason, or testimony.” (Greenfield)

¹⁹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/life>.

response.²⁰ Like when you feel the sunshine, and it is warm, and you like the warmth, and so you smile. And maybe you smile again later not because you are happy necessarily, but because you are trying to summon the feeling of happiness that you had while sitting in the sunshine. And another human being, seeing your smile, returns the expression with a smile of his own. And so you feel happy. There are no words, but this is communication. Poets are experts not in the particulars but in their arrangement. There are ordered patterns that emerge, independent from the objects themselves, that reveal the essential structures of human nature. So language is really about commiseration more than it is about differentiation, or, in other words, it is more about imagination than it is about knowledge. When you get to the point in a society when things are so controlled that connections between people are often more contrived than natural, you need art to put you back in touch with those universal human experiences that are the source of love. Otherwise, every human interaction becomes a transaction because all we see and share with each other are what separates, not what unifies. A true poet knows that we do not create meaning; we reflect it.”

“So why am I the conduit for this poetic spirit?”

“I’m not done yet, Carl! Prometheus! Let me talk a little bit about Prometheus!”

“Okay.”

“The lines you recited at Dr. Taine’s office were from Byron’s ‘Prometheus.’ The poem ends with Prometheus’ making death a victory. It is the ultimate poem of rebellion. Prometheus represents the untamed human spirit defying whatever social tyrannies, represented by Zeus and his hungry punitive vulture, are currently in play. Byron certainly lived his life in defiance of social norms! Oh, and the gossip nearly ruined his life! His wife circulated some horrible rumors about him after they separated.²¹ And still he penned ‘Don Juan,’ which was as vindictive and sacrilegious a work as the Brits had ever seen. Goethe defended it, by the way, but he was one of few.²² Personally, I have always found it a funny paradox that human beings acknowledge their imperfection (which is why they think they need governments and societies), and yet think they are capable of not only conceiving of perfect societies but also of managing to live in them. And if problems ensue, well, then, the *system* is the problem! If we can’t control the world, we must settle for making up rules to control all of the bad people in it!

²⁰ “Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.” Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “A Defence of Poetry.”

²¹ “In the Tory newspapers he was likened to Henry VIII, George III, Nero, Caligula and Epicurus. Byron teetered between outrage and self-aggrandisement, his name, which had been a knightly and noble one since his forefathers had helped to conquer England for William the Norman, was being ‘tainted.’” (O’Brien)

²² “‘Don Juan’ is a work of infinite genius, misanthropical with the bitterest inhumanity, yet sympathetic with the deepest intensity of tender feeling.” Wolfgang, Johann, and von Goethe. “Byron’s ‘Don Juan’.” *Goethe’s Literary Essays*. Ed. J. E. Spingarn. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company (1921).

Because those people are certainly not us! They're just the crazy people who believe in things and let their emotions get the best of them. We *know* that it's all just a matter of perspective, and we're so damned objective we don't take a stand on anything: there is no real 'right' and 'wrong'; there is no real 'good' life. By calling these words 'meaningless,' we have not come to any realizations about the human condition; we have redefined them and refused to acknowledge our new definitions. Now 'right' is being 'objective,' and 'wrong' is being 'subjective.' And the 'good' life is 'living without belief in the "good" life,' so there are no hierarchies or judgments of other beliefs, societies, or individuals—unless those people actually *believe* in their beliefs! And then, well, they are just uneducated or unenlightened. We are too enlightened to become emotionally involved with our thoughts and fall into the trap of absolutes, but there we go, we've just created another absolute for ourselves—and a particularly unsatisfying and uninspiring one at that. We believe we do not believe. And so we are impotent and aloof from the world, and our lives have no meaning because we will not deign to dirty our hands with convictions.”

“So, Harold—”

“Wait, Carl, I haven't gotten to the connection to Plato! You know the basics of Plato: the forms, which are eternal, fixed, and can be grasped only by the mind?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the romantics, who were heavily schooled in Greek, ironically took Plato's philosophy—Plato wanted the poets kicked out of the Republic, if you remember—and adopted a conception of a kind of Platonic ideal, a striving for a beauty and perfection that can never be achieved in the becoming world²³ but is nonetheless a reflection of a kind of real, eternal conception that all human beings share and can potentially have access to.

“And it is art that grants people this access because it is attuned, not only to reason, which is always necessarily either too specialized to be accessible to the majority of people, or is dangerously subject to the trappings of one's place and time because it is by its nature limited by *what is* ('the relations borne by one thought to another'—as soon as you get beyond this single interaction, you are traipsing into the realm of imagination, putting things together that did not go together in the first place) and suspicious of *what could be*, but to feeling, that which drives people, that which cannot be put into words, that which is utterly private and subjective, but all human beings, by the very nature of their aloneness, share. I have no doubt that people ten thousand years ago felt love, hate, pity, rage, sorrow, and disappointment, just as we do, only maybe for different reasons. And if we could feel those feelings with them, we would feel an affinity for them, see them as fellow human beings. But that's the whole problem when you've created a system that debunks stories; at some point, people have to live their lives. They shouldn't be automatons, always following the rules, because the rules do not always

²³ “As I see it, then, we must begin by making the following distinction: What is that which always is and has no becoming, and what is that which becomes but never is? The former is grasped by understanding, which involves a reasoned account. It is unchanging. The latter is grasped by opinion, which involves unreasoning sense perception. It comes to be and passes away but never really is” (27d-28a). Plato. *Timaeus*. Trans. Donald J. Zeyl. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company (2000).

apply. But if you don't believe in stories, if you can't imagine a way to live in which you're thinking and feeling and living as one person, you're either following the rules or chasing oblivion just to give yourself the excuse not to follow the rules for a moment.²⁴ And people are walking around in pieces, literally buying into an empty mythology of materialism that is 'safe' because it doesn't appear to involve the risk of absolute belief but still offers a moment or two of possibility and pleasure. But it is the very 'safe' and material nature of our pleasure that makes it so empty, causing us to gorge ourselves more and more without ever feeling satisfied. And we're all either killing ourselves to make money—usually far more money than we could ever possibly need—or feeling 'unfulfilled' if we have any free time and being unable to figure out why because we don't *believe* it is in our power to actually put ourselves back together again! If we do, it'll only turn out to be a lie. But all we have to do is believe we can do it. Not because belief guarantees success, but because belief itself is what we are missing. It's not the story that really matters, it's the belief! Find something to believe in, to put all of yourself into, not to blind yourself to reason, but to give yourself something whole to refer to against the fragmentation of the system, so you can negotiate the truth that always lies somewhere in-between the two."

"I have to go, Harold, there's someone knocking on my door."

"Are you just making an excuse to get me off the phone?"

"Yes, but there actually is someone at my door."

"*Entheos*, Carl! Be a scientist *and* a poet!"

"Okay, thanks, Harold. But that sounds like a lot of work. I don't think I have the energy for it."

"I will be calling you later with input from the critics!"

"Thanks, Harold."

"This is fantastic!" Harold was still hollering nonsense when Carl hung up the phone.

Carl, as usual, had been telling the truth. There was someone knocking on his door. Carl didn't know it yet, but it was Natasha's daughter May.

²⁴ "Such a flaw seems, at times, a consciously ironic reversal of the flaw in the tragic hero, which we usually define as the moral weakness in a basically well-ordered and reasonably decent man. For the romantic hero, though, the flaw is just the opposite, the one moral or decent aspect in a nature that tries hard to be unsociable or wicked." Garber, Frederick. "Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero." *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Autumn, 1967), pp. 321-333. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1769491>, 22/01/2012. I would argue that the rebelliousness and apartness of the romantic hero comes from his desire for love. He isolates himself from society and its rules because these structures deny the importance of his personal experience and so he reverses his values and inflates his internal conception of himself in order to excuse his indulgence in fantasy rather than social duty. Ironically, it is only through interaction with other human beings that he can hope to find that for which he truly longs, but as long as society values order more than love, the romantic hero, who is filled with *entheos* and has nowhere to put it, feels his only options are to live among men and deny his passions or live apart from them and at least be able to love his dreams.

VIII. The Passing of the Past

“Why did you beat up my mother?” May asked. She was sitting across from Carl at his kitchen table. He had given her a cup of tea, which was too hot to drink, so May leaned over, puckered her lips, and draped them over the edge of the cup, leaving a little bit of air between her upper lip and the liquid so she could simultaneously slurp the tea and cool it with her breath. Her eyes rolled up and to the side to stare at Carl while she drank.

“It was an accident,” Carl explained, gravely.

May’s hair was in two long pigtails tied with red ribbon. Carl couldn’t understand her. She was the most childish ten-year-old he had ever met. He didn’t know how to respond to her question because it seemed as innocent as a child’s and yet there also seemed to be an adult’s carefully hidden agenda snaking in the grass beneath it.

Carl’s phone, which was resting on the table close to May, lit up and buzzed with vibration. May swung her head to the opposite side without removing her lips from the tea cup. She glugged and then withdrew her mouth slightly in order to speak. “You have a text. Why don’t you answer it?”

Carl snatched the phone away from her and read the text:

“‘Milton’s Devil, as a moral being, is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in a purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy—not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the open and alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.’”²⁵

And then, just as soon as Carl had finished reading the lengthy message, another came through:

“*Entheos*, Carl! How ironic that the Devil is the one who believes in and labors for something greater than himself despite the fact that he knows he will not succeed! Isn’t this belief a necessary part of morality? On its own, it is dangerous, but without it, what is the difference between being good and doing what you’re told?”

“Is that from my mom?” May asked.

Carl put his phone aside. “No. What were you saying?”

“My mother,” May replied curtly, now pushing her tea cup and saucer away from her. “Why did you hit her?” Her voice had all of the cold conviction of a lawyer presenting her closing remarks to a jury.

“I didn’t want to hit her,” Carl said.

His phone buzzed again. Carl didn’t want to read it, but it was the only excuse not to answer May:

“‘From earliest childhood [Shelley] had taken the liveliest interest in the supernatural.

“Sometimes”, Hogg tells us, “he watched the livelong nights for ghosts”, and his researches into

²⁵ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “On the Devil, and Devils.” *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon (1997).

electricity and galvanism, which were to be resumed so ardently in his Oxford days, were varied by the eager perusal of volumes on magic and witchcraft. With the help of the rules herein presented, he even tried to raise a ghost himself, uttering incantations and drinking thrice out of a human skull (or its substitute) as he bestrode a running stream.”²⁶

Carl opened his mouth to make some excuse to May, to tell her he had been frustrated by work, that he had slipped on a wet substance on the floor, that he had turned too suddenly and knocked into the unsuspecting Natasha, but he instead chanted the following lines:

“While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed.”²⁷
Harold again:

“This longing for darkness is the same desire for some vast, unspeakable thing, for something greater than ourselves that we can never really touch or understand.”

“Are you saying that ghosts made you do it?” May asked, her skepticism evident in her squinting eyes.

“No, no.” Carl clapped his hands over his eyes. He felt overwhelmed. He could not speak.

“Why do people hurt people? Is it always men? My dad hurt my mom, too, before he left us.”

Carl kept his head bowed and did not speak.

“My mom didn’t do anything wrong, did she?”

Breathing, Carl responded instinctively in his thoughts, *she was breathing*.

Harold, giving Carl another much-needed reprieve, and yet frustrating him all the same: “Byron, I said, has not a great artist’s profound and patient skill in combining an action or in developing a character,—a skill which we must watch and follow if we are to do justice to it. But he has a wonderful power of vividly conceiving a single incident, a single situation; of throwing himself upon it, grasping it as if it were real and he saw and felt it, and of making us see and feel it too.”²⁸

“I didn’t mean to hurt her,” Carl said, helplessly.

“Then why did you?” May persisted.

Harold:

“The skill of the poet! What I was talking about before! Making you almost feel what someone else felt. Creating a sense of universality in the vivid depiction of someone’s personal experience.”

²⁶ Strong, Archibald T. “The Sinister in Shelley.” *Three Studies in Shelley and an Essay on Nature in Wordsworth and Meredith*. London: Oxford University Press (1921), pp. 107-147.

²⁷ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” from *ibid.* (“The Sinister in Shelley”)

²⁸ Arnold, Matthew. “Byron.” *Essays in Criticism; First and Second Series*. London: Dent (1964).

“May, you’re too young to understand this, but sometimes...people do things they don’t mean.”

“I know. I do things I don’t mean all of the time. But that doesn’t mean I don’t *want* to do them. I don’t care what you say: you *wanted* to hit my mother. I *want* to know why.” There was no trace of the child in her face now. Her expression was so fixed that it carved lines into her skin.

Harold:

““The deadly juggernaut the Doge makes of the state is a reflection of the ruthless self-control he practises upon himself, for he loves his son but will not be seen to unbend. “I cannot weep,” he tells Marina, “I would if I could” (II.i.78), and the hypersensitivity that perceives sympathy as condescension explodes when she attempts to commiserate: “Pitied! None / Shall ever use that base word, with which men / Cloak their soul's hoarded triumph, as a fit one / To mingle with my name” (II.i.146-49). The first consequence of such repression is as always the sense of a hostile, determinist universe...””²⁹

Harold again, with superhuman texting speed, immediately afterwards:

“Haven’t we decided that the universe is hostile to human life, and doesn’t it seem that way because nothing ever works out the way *we* plan, and *we* are convinced—*absolutely* convinced that having things turn out the way *we think they should* is the always the *right* way? And so we are always at war with the world for not meeting our expectations. And how exhausting and fruitless a battle it is! And so we either abandon all responsibility, or we go around controlling everything, every little moment, every little thing, because *we think we know* how the world should be.”

“Dr. Townsend, I need to know.” May’s aged face flushed.

Carl continued to look down at his phone even though he had already read the lengthy message there. “Yes, May, I wanted to hit her,” Carl admitted.

“Why?”

“Because she made me feel weak.”

May got up from her chair and walked over to Carl. She stood next to him, looking down at his downcast face. Carl did not look up at her. May leaned over and kissed him gently on his forehead. Then she turned and skipped out the front door.

Harold:

“The message of the poet must strive to reach outside of all systems, religious, social, and political, because no single system is perfect or capable of anticipating and recognizing all that human beings need. And so a chaotic force must always be there, a spirit, a pulsing, a desire for life, to push back—not necessarily to destroy—but to balance, by speaking out in passionate defense of our humanity.”

²⁹ Manning, Peter J. “Rebels Cosmic and Domestic.” *Byron and His Fictions*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press (1978), pp. 146-174.

IX. The Diagnosis

“When was the last time you heard the voices?” Dr. Taine inquired.

“It’s been over a month,” Carl said.

Dr. Taine nodded. “I have spoken with your neurologist, and he is pleased with the results of your most recent tests. I am inclined to believe that the psychological manifestations were due to the physical damage that occurred as a result of your accident. I would like to schedule a few more sessions, but I am happy with your progress.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

Carl decided to walk home from Dr. Taine’s office that day. He needed some time to think. A lot had changed in the past few weeks. He had fired Natasha, gotten her the best severance package available, and heard from some of their coworkers that she planned to move back to New Jersey to be closer to her family. The idea of traveling had also caught hold of Harold, for he had decided to spend a month in England’s Lake District, strolling and musing among the spirits of the romantic poets. “I had forgotten what it felt like to be in love!” Harold had exclaimed in enthusiastic explanation.

Carl, too, had forgotten, but he was trying to remember. Spring was now at the climax of her fecund display, and almost every plant in view seemed to have sprouted some kind of delicate, colorful flower. There was still joy and newness in feeling the sunshine well after five o’clock. Cars clogged the streets of the town, but Carl could meander down the sidewalks at a dreamy pace. There was no one waiting at home for him; he could wander for as long as he liked.

It had been three weeks since he left Emily. The moment he had walked out of the door, the fist that had been clenched in his chest for over a decade suddenly relaxed, and he could breathe. He was a cruel man, a violent man, and a liar. But he was breathing.

Seized by an inexplicable urge, Carl leapt onto the nearest bench. No one passing by seemed to notice, even after Carl, still hearing and speaking poetry, burst into the last lines of “Adonais”:

“The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.”³⁰

³⁰ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “Adonais.” *The Literature Network: Online Classic Literature, Poems, and Quotes. Essays & Summaries*. <http://www.online-literature.com>. 28/12/2012.

And as he descended from the bench feeling as omnipotent as a god, he misjudged the distance, tripped over his own pant leg, and tumbled to the concrete.³¹

Aware that the power that moved him was never entirely in his control, Carl did not feel the need to close his eyes, and he was able to lessen the severity of his fall. Stunned from the impact but still conscious, he looked back at the rusty bench on which he had just stood, filled, for only an ephemeral moment, with all of the fire and air of *entheos*.

And Carl Townsend burst out laughing.

³¹ “While Shelley's preface holds open the possibility that some individuals may find moral community through a natural (and implicitly unreflective) sympathy, the real choice seems to be between disillusionment and moral death. To be ‘deluded by ... generous error,’ to be ‘duped by ... illustrious superstition,’ is the price of moral life in Shelley's world of philosophical skepticism.¹ For the Poet Visionary who is the subject of the poem, this disappointment is intolerable, but for the poet of the preface, it becomes the pre-condition of moral action. Such disillusionment is the double awareness that neither the foundations nor the goals of moral agency can be deduced naturally according to the Enlightenment plan. Rather, morality entails an act of self-reflection in which the self and the self reflected can never match, can never be completely subsumed in a moral universe.” Dunn, Allen. “Out of the Veil of Ignorance: Agency and the Mirror of Disillusionment.” *Southern Humanities Review* 25.1 (Winter 1991), pp. 1-21.

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